tried to sleep. Mary had had her temptations. One of them had been big. She had put it away without taking much credit for it because it had appeared clear to her that the cost of mortally wounding Billy and putting the years of relationship with her children in jeopardy and dumping a rich store of valuable happy memories was a cost she could not dream of paying. Nevertheless there was a man. He would come back. She could begin all over with him if necessary. He had a little more skill in living than Billy. He would be a little more unselfish. And surely more loyal.

Damn the thought of it! At the very moment when Billy and she both needed all her help and sense there was that thought, plucking, plucking, plucking, and that voice sounding again as it had once sounded. "Dear stranger: If you ever want them, these hands and these arms are yours." They were nice hands and strong fine arms. She had not thought of them for years. Now they were stretching out to her through the dark of night, and when her eyes filled with tears they stretched out to her at high noon. She felt like crying to the heavens and the stars. "I can go! I can go!"

Once in an unreasoning moment, a moment of hot folly, she asked Billy out of a clear sky, "Have you ever kissed Edith Barston?"

He rose from the porch chair in a rage; this was his opportunity for righteousness, technical righteousness, and he would make the most of it. "Gad!" he shouted. "What are you made of? What a revolting mind! Of course, I haven't. Sex doesn't mean anything much to me."

Of course, at times of affection it meant something to him. It would have meant a good deal more, too, if he had not acquired the notion that it was in some ways base rather than an urge of nature capable of all the exquisite beauty which a person can put into it.

"Listen!" he said. "I won't have you interfering with my right to know whatever is good and fine in anybody in the world! I won't have you attributing vulgar motives either to me—or to her!"

To her? His righteous defense of her! Now a passionate champion of her? Disclosed were all his attempts at indifference, and attempts to make gestures of contempt for Edith. Now he had raised his voice so high that little Jane dropped her sand bucket and came up peering at her father curiously.

"Daddy's cross all the time," she announced. The inscrutability which occasionally blankets the emotions and impressions of a child made her assertion sound as colorless as a statement that the fisherman had come on his weekly round. But Mary, watching Jane as she returned to her play, shuddered.

She could not foresee what would come in those next 24 hours. She could only now feel the resentment against rank injustice surge up her throat, into her eyelids, fill her until it seemed to strain at her fingertips. Coward, trickster, liar, brazen self-lover, fool made ridiculous by parading in the borrowed misfit of wisdom, seeking to avoid playing the game, trying to cheat, to beat it, baying at the moon, rocking the boat when other lives than his own were at stake, quitter!

She held these words behind her closed teeth; restraint came because there came the thought that this was not the real Billy—the Billy she had loved and trusted and guided — this was the human Billy — the poor human thing which gets off its track of decency occasionally—the feeble thing which, having been offered the best candy of God, demands the whole box and refuses to contribute to it, to earn it, to pay for it, to prove by achievement rather than plan achievement, to pay as it goes.

She was glad she had not said these things, because, after the children were in bed and she had come down, Billy had a moment of tenderness. He, probably, had not noticed that whenever in the old days he had gone by her when she was sitting, he had patted her face, put his hand on her shoulder, turned her chin so that her face was raised to his, but that now he no longer did these things and walked by pleasantly, but a little as if passing were a nuisance and an embarrassment. Of course, he might think that his leaning toward the calm, female philosopher Edith had no such coarse urge as physical contacts, but something had effectively killed spontaneous tenderness toward Mary.

The moon was on the water, the jagged hills on the cape projecting out into the blue black of the quiet sea were half concealed in a silver and violet mist. The little waves in the cove ran their tongues along the beach and made a sipping noise like glad beings tasting daintily of peace.

Billy did not turn on the porch light. He came behind her and took her cool cheek in the palm of his hand. He used to say that it just fitted. She leaned her head eagerly toward that welcome touch and heard his voice say, "Well, old girl, you've put a lot of hours into your work today."

She laughed softly. She was afraid she would cry out her joy to the moon. She could not believe it was his step behind her. She could not believe it was his hand. She could not believe it was his voice. She managed to summon the thoughts which she always felt she must have about her work — that it must never look backward; that it must never look forward too far; that she must always regard herself as an instrument to be used and at last worn out, and if necessary, throw away.

"I feel rested now," she said. "I lost my temper with the children tonight. Why should the young mind conceive the idea of taking a cake of soap to bed."

"It's that bright blue color," he answered. "You ought to go back to the white soap."

A few months ago he would have said "we ought." Now he gave her a kind of outsider's counsel. But joy had surged over her. It had caught her up in its arms and she was afraid she would be unable to contain her emotion. She always marveled that the same control which made her follow a routine, the same which had brought her name in a small way to the scientific world, never came to her rescue when she desired to conceal her real self. How could she account now to Billy for her tears? He would not believe they were tears of joy. He would begin to discuss. Perhpas that would destroy an illusion. Some illusions are necessary to go with life, she thought, and those who in the name of truth declare against all illusions have only reached the first primer in the art of reading human existence.

"Billy," she said quite steadily, "I'm going to take a walk—a walk alone."

He made no protest. She remembered now that once he would have said immediately: "Alone? What ails you? Brooding? Why don't you take me? I'm a good companion." He had said that very thing often and sometimes she remembered she could have burst out at him, "Can't I have a minute away from work children—even you, to be with myself?" But now she would have given, it seemed, the whole world to have him say, "I'll go with you."

Instead, he flopped down in the pillows on the swinging couch and said as she walked out into the light of the moon, "Don't go alone along the cliff. It's dark in the underbrush. You might get a fall."

She did no care. She was happy. It was coming out all right. Everybody had bumpy places in life and always thought when they were reached that it was the end of everything. Usually the end is not the end; usually the hesitant pendulum swings on and the clock ticks once more. What a comfort! She sat down, content to be free again from panic and pain—deliberately weighing nothing. If the top of the cliff were hard, what of it? If the needles of a pine seedling pricked her cheek, what of that? There was the moon now white and high, and the waves marking a lullaby rhythm below and a world of black-blue sea and blue-black sky meeting each other somewhere behind the long thin veil of the fog.

Once she glanced toward Edith's house. Lights still burned in the lower windows with that peculiar red eyed appearance that summer cottages always give out. Perhaps Edith was working on her poetry, or her sculpture, or her philosophical essays, or writing letters. She was best known for her letters; she finished letters. But that was not Edith's shadow there passing and passing inside.

No. It was her aunt's shadow. Mary had forgotten the aunt. There was an aunt—Miss Tompkins—sister of Edith's mother. Mary had forgotten about the aunt. Poor Miss Tompkins, tiny, a little worn, prim, not an idea of her own, used to being dominated, half a chaperon, half a maid, always so neat and so suppresed, so timid, so self-effacing. She depended on Miss Barston for her living, her existence, and she was almost nonexistent, seldom seen, always ready, a tiny voice, a tiny personality. Everybody forgot about the aunt. Edith helped everybody to forget about the aunt. It was the aunt who puttered around, afraid, putting out Edith's night clothes, saying nothing, listening to Edith—bullied, perhaps. Her little hands were somewhat emaciated and the sinews and veins were prominent enough to throw shadows. Mary wondered why she thought of Miss Tompkins.

Wondering why, she got up slowly and continued her walk.

It was an unpleasant shock after crossing the patch of delicious cool carpet of fine grass beyond the path to the spring to hear Billy's voice just below her, on the rocks.

He was protesting in a low tone. He said, "After all, I have been the one who has said that come what may, we must never let the physical side enter into it."

"No, Billy," said Edith. "I have never tempted you, have I?"

"Not by anything you've ever done."

"Only by what I am?"

"Yes, that's it."

"Well, Billy, I only said what I said because of pity. I know things without being told. I know when a person is hungry for affection. I know—famine—when I come near it, Billy."

"Then if ever—if ever we——"

Edith's voice was quite clear now; above a mumble. She said: "We must keep our little world so clean now, Billy. So irreproachable and clean."

He did not appear to be enthusiastic, as he said, "Of course, dear, of course!"

There was a long, long pause. Other people's intense conversations always sound so silly! Mary felt ashamed to hear on her own account, but also on theirs. She had tried to retreat. She had moved five steps or more when she heard the other woman say:

"Billy, I can give you more than that, dear. I can give you release. I can give you freedom to express yourself. There is no crime in the world like that of one personality dominating and absorbing and fettering another. The one thing I fear above all else is to dominate some one. And you, Billy, have such an unusuol capacity! You are like a great virgin country full of infinite resources of soil and unmined treasure. After the plans you have told me tonight, I ——"

Mary could not hear the rest. She knew those plans of his! It was old stuff to her. It was like a vaudeville act comprising the pick of all the old lines she had learned these many years. She could see that compressed into a few weeks they would make an outpouring of program, aspiration, drama and false dawn which could in mere volubility create a kind of personal tidal wave.

But Billy was speaking, saying quietly as if the words were not freely quoted from Mary's own lips: "We must not base our understanding on words, Edith. Words are so easy. We must turn our words into life."

"I can do that, Billy—for you. I've been an awful fraud, but now—"

Mary wondered why at this moment she could admit that much of Edith was so good. At this moment unaccountably she gave the other her due. She admitted to herself that Edith was sincere, that Edith, like Billy, felt on a high plane, that she, like Billy, would try, as human beings do to avoid kisses, touch of hand and hand, and all that leads to. Mary admitted Edith's charm; it was the charm of slow, dreamy yearnings in a nature seeking, if not finding ways to useful unselfishness. Edith was pretty. Edith was clever. She was clever in easy agreement with the opinions of others, clever in attention to those from whom she desired attention. Her nose tilted up. Her forehead was high and white. Her slender, fragile body was not without its beauty. Her slender limbs were not without their responsive sinews. Her chin was not without its firmness.

Her attempt to give just appraisal of Edith saved Mary something of heartbreak on the way home. Once at the door, she felt an impulse to fly up the stairs, tear Jane out of bed, and hold her tighty, as if everything in the world had gone.

She undressed by moonlight, and simulated sleep. He came in, it appeared to her, softly, furtively, tiptoeing around—like a burglar, with the furtive manner of a burglar—like one who fears the sleeper, regaining consciousness, will say, "What have you stolen?"

But she, too, was deceptive now. She only said. "Is that you Billy?"

"Yep."

Only after he had slept did she get up, cautiously. The breeze on the little balcony blew her night gown and crept caressingly up the skin of her torso like the cool fingers of friendly ghosts. It helped. It helped her to think carefully and in order; it helped to make her decide what she must do now. She eliminated one wrong, hasty idea after another. She must do something for herself, something effective for the children; and then, at last, she thought she must do something for Billy. Billy was nine-tenths worth her best effort. Dear Billy! How could one say it of such a fool? She wondered. Dear Billy!

Just across the cove a light still burned in an upper window; Edith was there, perhaps sitting under her boudoir lamp with her own thoughts tumbling helter - skelter and her frilly night gown laid out on her bed by the little hands of her effaced aunt.

Mary suddenly felt like a god who gazes down upon tiny, lovable creatures. And her mind grew cool and took its steps from one firm stone to the next. When she went to bed at daylight she felt that she had crossed a torrent, that she had arrived on another shore.

This new day! Billy? Oh, Billy was going fishing. He was with the Thurman boys—13 and 10—and old Captain Perkins, who never combed his beard. That was Billy—interested in boys, like a boy; giving himself as freely to boys as boys gave their personalities to him. It was absurd. He himself such a boy, and then suddenly a discoverer of great new thruths which he believed would meet the thing he called the New World. As if there ever were a New World! Billy, who always said he wanted to face the facts and the truths, no matter what the cost, was clinging so fast to all the great illusions. Yes, the great and wasteful illusions—that a program can supplant the need for deeds; that by a few formulae humanity can be transformed; that a being becomes larger, and not smaller, by shutting himself up in a temple of the Sacred Self; that, somehow, it was always necessary to deny that this significant creed had anything to do with sex.

He kissed her goodbye. The same old feeling of the falling elevator! If anything should happen to Billy!

It was 11 when she sent Jane with a note to Edith. Of course, she had no right to request Miss Barston to come to see her, but Mary smiled as she realized how certain it was that Edith would come.

The other woman came across the narrow strip of daisy field in the hollow, following the path through the old turnstile. Swallows darted above her head. She was swinging a wide brimmed hat in her hand. A red book was under her other arm, making a pretty contrast with the happy yellow of her dress. She may have believed Billy would be home.

"Good morning, Mrs. Elbridge."

She had called Mrs. Elbridge Mary for a time, and then had dropped the practice.

"I wonder if you can imagine why I wanted to see you?" Mary asked cheerfully. She even turned her glance toward Jane as she asked, as if she did not care at all about the expression of apprehension sure to appear on Edith's usually composed features. "Run in the house, dear. Mother wants to talk with Miss Barston."

"I can't imagine!" the other woman replied, in a tone of exaggerated, childish expectancy.

Mary felt a warm content now. If the other had only shown bravery, she would have felt a moment of doubt.

"It's about Billy," she announced in a patient voice.

"O, about Billy?"

"Yes. Billy and you. About these two or three weeks."

"He has been talking about me?" Self was alert in Edith. There was a little snarl of distrust and self-defense in her sentence; there was a little suggestion of an accusation, as if she had started to say, "He has been talking about me, the cad!"

Mary said: "O, no. It is too soon. If you had lived with Billy as long as I have, he would talk about you perhaps. Just as he has talked to you about me. Not so one could accuse him of actually saying anything—but by inference. I am to blame for—what shall I call it?—his sterility."

Miss Barston leaned forward, picked up a current magazine from the floor, trying to regain her balance.

"I assume you have offered Billy something I cannot give him," Mary said. "A set of unfortunate circumstances—and somehow they always come in cases like this—has made me see what is, approximately, even, the fine values of your friends hip—with Billy."

"It has been too fine to deny—even to you," the other said with defiance but with evident belief in a certain righteousness.

Mary smiled. "I believe you," she said. "I may be an odd kind of person, but I honestly see that there is always something good about relationships. Of course, the damage done to one's self or others may overtop the good. But I can't condemn you much, because it isn't in my head to do it; and somehow I cannot condemn Billy, because it isn't in my heart."

"What do you mean by 'damage'?"

Mary answered Edith after a moment of thought. "Well, for instance, neither you nor Billy made a confidante of me. Somehow those forces which compete with the family, even when they have no element of sex in them—and that's not often—fail to uncover themselves. There is always something surreptitious about them; something furtive even when they are carried on in so great a cause as opening the door of the cage to set an enslaved soul free."

Miss Barston looked down into the white china silk lining of her broad brimmed hat.

"I remember a man who thought he was infatuated with me two years ago. He had that great cause. He wanted to set me free. We are all susceptible to that, and I am, too. Particularly every spring. I had to tell him finally that, having given it due thought, I really did not want to be set free."

Edith laughed, and after a moment said, "You spoke of damage to ourselves?"

"For instance?" Mary answered promptly. "Well, you blamed Billy for telling me about your—intellectual—intimacy and harmony. If I had asked him, what would you have had him do? Tell, I suppose. That's what you have done."

"I can't be put in the position of telling an untruth," said Miss Barston. "Particularly when you appear to know. We'll put it another way. If I have affection for him—a high kind of affection—I cannot deny it. It would be like your denying that Jane was your own child."

"But you have given Billy away," Mary said. "You were furious within when you thought he might have exposed you. Apparently there is the dilemma."

"Well, what do you want?" Miss Barston said wearily. "I thought I was contributing something. I certain have not suggested to Billy—any—any——"

"I know what you mean."

"Well, then—what is there to do?"

"I'll tell you my thought," Mary replied. "It may not be worth much. But, at any rate, people always seem to overlook it. It is this: you and Billy ought to have the chance to really know each other. You both, apparently, make a kind of fetich of destroying illusion and facing truth squarely, and I think it would be a good thing—for you to know Billy."

"Know him?"

"Of course. Both you and Billy are so concerned about life and its problems—and are so troubled about them—surely you want your judgments founded on the evidence."

"You mean Billy isn't what I think he is?"

"I didn't say so. How do I know? I suspect he isn't—quite."

"I'd like to know why you suspect it."

"Well, in a way, because he isn't what I thought he was once."

"Your opinion has changed?"

"No."

"Billy — Mr. Elbridge — has changed?"

"No."

"Then, what can you mean?"

"I mean that most human beings are like a barrel of apples packed for the market. The best ones—the ones without the worms or rot, the large, pink cheeked fruit—are always on top."

Miss Barston stared.

"For instance, Billy has talked a stream to you," Mary went on. "He has exhibited his top layer. It is quite fascinating, as I myself know very well. You always see him when he is shaved and well and carefully prepared. That is the top of the barrel. I suppose you have shown Billy the top of your barrel, too, Miss Barston?"

Edith did not answer at once. She finally said, "That certainly wasn't my intention."

"I know it wasn't," Mary said. "It never is. It's merely human. I think it is unavoidable. Temporary stimulation of anybody brings out the best side. Who can blame anybody for showing what is on the top of the barrel? But I wonder how much trouble could be saved in the world if fascinated persons could only see"—she paused—"see the bottom of the barrel."

"But there is no way," said Edith eagerly, becoming interested. "Besides, you have seen it, of course."

"Yes; I know the layers all the way to the bottom of Billy's barrel. Even better than he does. He doesn't know that when he tries to make fun of my work in the laboratory it isn't good natured humor, but jealous, destructive, dominating instinct that does it. And he thinks he means it when he tells me that talk is idle and that acts are the only things that count. Yet it is not Billy who makes into reality the plans he sets forth. I hope he will. He hasn't yet."

Edith clasped her hands nervously.

"Of course, I cannot deny that it would be useful to be able to see to the bottom of the barrel," she admitted.

"It is possible," Mary said, brushing away a fly.

"Possible!"

Mary laughs. "Quite. When I was in college I went rather far with physics. I never dropped my interest. There have been wonders done with the dictaphonic instruments. I'm not joking. I'm serious. I can put a little receiver behind a picture in our bedroom and at the other end of a wire a little transmitter beside your desk or your bed. You can hear Billy."

"It is dishonest!" exclaimed Miss Barston.

"Which is more dishonest," asked Mary, "concealment of the truth or revelation?"

The breeze from the sea blew across the honeysuckle blossoms on

(Continued on Page Seven.)